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Mr. Hichens has taken for his "Bella Donna"/* a type somewhat similar to that of Sudermann's Lily, but he has not done so well by it. He has elevated the lady's birth, her character, her social surroundings. Writing for a race that Continentals call hypocritical and that ourselves call delicate-minded, he could do no better probably. The penalty is that as we do not believe in his smart people we suspect equally his Egyptians. As for his Nile, it is not half so good as his desert. What a man has once done well he should painfully avoid recalling. He has learned structure from French masters, but he has been a little demoralized of late by the success of certain unwieldy novels of quite another sort. This is a little too like its own stream of the Nile, morbid, ceaseless, marked only by eddies and windings. The great novels are carved out of life or built up of psychology. There is no third sort. Yet this is very readable.

The privilege of getting to the heart of the past is one of the few compensations humanity possesses for its perpetual misunderstanding of the present. But it is a privilege open at first hand to but few. There is no single key that will unlock the verities of a dead age. History will not if by history is meant a mere chronicle of events, of battles, diplomacy and the rise and fall of States, or even if it essays its nobler function of tracing the course and progress of the movements that have shaped thoughts and beliefs and the constitution of society. Romance will not unless, as in "*Romola*," it is buttressed by an abounding knowledge and the genius that can sympathize and portray, and unless, too, it preserves a happier balance between fact and fancy than George Eliot was able to maintain. A very rare conjunction of qualities is necessary if an attempt to reconstruct and visualize the past is to satisfy our sense of truth and our sense of life. The brain to master the accumulations of research instead of being fettered by them, the eye to distinguish the essential, revealing fact or trait or custom in events and men and society, the power of dramatic imagination moving, tense and concentrated, as familiarly among bygone days as one moves about one's house, the sensibilities to capture the spirit and standpoint and search the

* "Bella Donna." By Robert Hichens. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1909.

soul and emotions of men and women three hundred years in their graves, and, lastly, the incommunicable art that will present the whole with a flashing nearness—all these are needed, and with them all the author of “*Gentleman Errant*”* is generously equipped. Mrs. Henry Cust has, indeed, produced a fascinating and brilliant book. Taking four old German chronicles of the later Middle Ages, she follows the hero of each one of them through his journeyings and adventures over western Europe, weaving them into a narrative that is an admirable mingling of archaic quaintness and modern vivacity. Steeped in the spirit and literature of the period, prolific of the happiest notes and illustrations, she carries her weight of erudition with a most gallant and seductive grace. And what a period it was that these annals so delightfully cover:

“Within this century and a half—that is, from about 1450–1600 happen the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation; the distribution of the printing-press, the revelations of Copernicus and the discovery of America; the growth, the triumph and the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire; the evolution of England from the brilliant adolescence of the Plantagenets to the splendid maturity of the Tudors; the transformation of France from the formless impotence of half-dead feudalism to the ordered might of an absolute sovereignty; the conversion of Spain from a land of chaos to a land in bondage to the uttermost letter of law and orthodoxy; the abasement of Italy through the indignity of her polities and the exaltation of Italy through the supremacy of her art. And though these chronicles are but scattered pebbles on a crowded shore, though their heroes pass strenuous lives in almost perfect ignorance of the vast movements that are surging round them, yet even the meanest has not remained untouched by the mighty tide.”

It is, indeed, one of the engrossing charms of this volume, that against this prodigious background, now bright, now thunderous, but always quick with the forces and ferment of unsuspected change, are set with consummate realism the lives and doings, the petty interests and passions, of four typical knightly figures. We see them exactly as they were and as they moved, where and in what state they journeyed, how they dressed and feasted and gambled and fought and courted and danced their little dashing lives away. We follow them from Salisbury to

* “*Gentlemen Errant*”; being the Journeys and Adventures of Four Noblemen in Europe during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. By Mrs. Henry Cust. New York: Dutton & Co.

Cracow and from Portugal to Denmark, through "the humming plains of Burgundy and Flanders, the leafy parks of England, the mellow gardens of France, on the desolate Spanish uplands and in the fruit-filled Spanish valleys, among the lovely streets and lawless highways of Italy," now lodging in the squalid sties of Poland, now camping on the dreary battle-fields of the Low Countries. All the tumult and color of the time, the ceremonies, miracles, customs, characters, revels, courts, superstitions, the external aspects and internal economy of country after country, are here compressed and cut and polished for us in five hundred unflagging pages. It is the human, intimate, picturesque details of a resounding epoch that Mrs. Cust has preserved for us, embroidering them with the deftest fingers on to the records of her four gentlemen errant. Her style is precisely suited to her purpose and subject—full of life and rhythm and swift, sure movement; eloquent, ornate and telling; a rich and glittering setting for the splendid animation of the pageant she unfolds. We know of no book quite like this. It is at once history vitalized by translation and condensation into a handful of intensely human personalities; romance deriving fresh interest and realism from history; and both history and romance illuminated by deep and vivid learning and linked by an exquisitely adjusted art into a sequence of living narratives. In other words, the book has completely succeeded in the aim which one presumes Mrs. Cust set before her—that of displaying the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe as eras not alone of great movements, but of breathing men and women, and of showing us, in a succession of graphic instances, the bent of their minds, the nature of their surroundings, their habits and appearances, their shifts and triumphs, and the strange, wild, flaming thing they made of life. In these four gentlemen errant Europe as it was between the taking of Constantinople and the defeat of the Spanish Armada lives again before us, now gruesomely, now charmingly, at times a riot of war and waste, at times a splash of primitive splendor, but vital and entralling always. It is a very real and a very welcome addition to our store of knowledge and entertainment that Mrs. Cust has made.